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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes activities associated with school-improvement projects in 12 Louisiana School Effectiveness and Assistance Pilot Study (SEAP) Cohort One schools during school year 1997-98 and plans for future improvement activities in 1998-99. Faculty and administrators at each school were asked to revise their current school-improvement plans, drawing on recommendations from Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) reports based on SEAP-II findings from 1996-97 and needs assessments obtained from faculties as part of the SEAP-II process. Two state educational representatives were assigned to assist each school. The 12 Cohort One improvement projects were undertaken in 1997-98, with varying degrees of success. Tentative plans for improvement efforts in Cohort One and Cohort Two schools in 1998-99 and future years are discussed, along with their twofold purpose: "front loading" instructional improvement and building capacity to support comprehensive reform. Verbal reports and written responses to questionnaires indicated there was a sizeable effect of SEAP-II assessments on three schools seeking considerable assistance from LDE and regional service centers. The SEAP-II assessment had some effect in two schools also desiring such assistance, but had little effect in two other schools not desiring assistance. Included are an abstract and 18 tables. (Contains 35 references.) (MLH)

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Tying School Improvement to School Accountability: A Review of the School Effectiveness and Assistance Pilot Study Phase III (SEAP-III)

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Tying School Improvement to School Accountability:
A Review of the School Effectiveness and Assistance Pilot Study
Phase III (SEAP-III)

Abstract: This paper summarizes activities associated with school improvement projects in 12 SEAP Cohort One schools during School Year (SY) 1997-98 and the plans for future improvement activities in SY 1998-89. Faculty and administrators at each of the 12 schools were supposed to voluntarily revise their current School Improvement Plans (SIPs), drawing on (a) recommendations from Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) reports based on SEAP-II findings from SY 1996-97 and (b) needs assessments obtained from the faculties as part of the SEAP-II process.

Two state educational representatives [one from the LDE and one from a Regional Service Center (RSC)] were assigned to assist each of the 12 schools. Their assistance was initiated by the 12 Cohort One schools and was consistent with the goals of the SIPs at those schools. The 12 Cohort One school improvement projects were undertaken in the schools in SY 1997-98 with varying degrees of success. Reasons for their relative success are discussed.

The tentative plans for school improvement efforts in Cohort One and Cohort Two schools (an additional 45 schools) in SY 1998-99, and in future years, are discussed as a final topic in this paper. A twofold purpose for this long term school improvement plan is discussed: "front loading" improvement of classroom teaching and building capacity to implement comprehensive reform.

SEAP site teams and external school improvement specialists can provide valuable external perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of schools and facilitate the delivery of needed resources and services to support school improvement. At times, the SEAP process may even serve as a mechanism for validating the staff's own preconceived needs. Ultimately, however, the direction and the impetus for improvement should come from the school itself, backed by the shared commitment of faculty, administrators, district, and community.

Tying School Improvement to School Accountability: A Review of SEAP-III

I. Introduction

The Louisiana Department of Education initiated a school improvement process in SY 1997-98 as part of the second year of the School Effectiveness and Assessment Pilot. Since the emphasis in SY 1997-98 was on SEAP-II, an intensive school assessment process, activities associated with SEAP-III, the school improvement process, were kept simple.

There are six stages to the current improvement activities associated with SEAP-III:

(1) Intensive on-site analysis of 12 Cohort One schools in the Spring 1997 using the SEAP-II process. (Described in a previous paper given in this session.)

(2) Generation of a SEAP-II School Report for each of the 12 Cohort One schools, including recommendations for school improvement. (Also described in a previous paper.)

(3) Presentation of the SEAP-II reports first to the Principal and Superintendent and then to the faculty as a whole. (Ending in October, 1997)

(4) Presentation of a School Improvement Conference for representatives of the 12 Cohort One Schools. (November, 1997)

(5) Refinement of School Improvement Plans by the 12 Cohort One Schools based on recommendations from SEAP-II reports. (This stage is voluntary.)

(6) Deployment of two person school assistance teams (one from the Louisiana Department of Education housed in Baton Rouge and one from the Regional Service Center in which the school is located) to the 12 Cohort One schools. (Beginning in January, 1998)

(7) Refinement of the SEAP-III school assistance model for SY 1998-99 and future years, based on several types of inputs.

The following report will include: a brief review of the recommendations from SEAP-II, a review of the process whereby schools were presented their SEAP-II report, a synopsis of the School Improvement Conference, a description of the experiences of the school assistance teams in the 12 Cohort One schools in SY 1997-98, and a description of a tentative plan for school improvement efforts in SY 1998-99 and future years.

II. A Brief Review of the SEAP-II Recommendations for Cohort One Schools

As indicated in the previous paper (Heroman, Pol, and Franklin, 1998), the two most frequently occurring categories of SEAP-II recommendations for Cohort One schools were in:

(1) leadership (typically associated with school level change) and

(2) professional development (typically associated with changing the behaviors of teachers in classrooms).

This two level approach to school improvement is consistent with the overall philosophy that has driven the SEAP process: meaningful school change must occur simultaneously at both the classroom and school levels. Therefore, assessment data must be gathered at both levels and recommendations for improvement must be made at both levels.

Change at the School and Classroom Levels: A Brief Literature Review

This philosophy of pursuing change at both the school and classroom levels came out of the school effectiveness and improvement literatures of the 1990's. During the early 1990's, several school improvement or "restructuring" models were widely adopted by schools and districts. Most reformers agreed that the main purpose of these school restructuring models was to transform teaching practice which in turn would lead to improvement in student learning (Elmore, 1995 and Finnan, 1996). Fullan (1993) indicated, however, that the "learning core", which consists of both instructional practices and teacher culture, is the most difficult area to change. Keller and Soler (1996) further reported that "deep changes in teacher behavior" are rare events, and when they occur, are a result of long-term internalization of beliefs and practices.

Elmore (1995) called for further research into teaching practice in restructuring schools, suggesting that the relationship between structural school changes and changes in teaching are mediated by factors such as teachers' skills and knowledge. Taylor and Teddlie (1992, 1996) presented such research in their analysis of a prominent restructuring district. Despite verbal support from top level district administrators, evidence indicated that restructuring had, in fact, not influenced the classrooms. Teachers in schools classified as "highly restructured" were no more likely to collaborate with their colleagues than were teachers from low participation schools.

Teacher-directed and whole-group approaches prevailed in classrooms of both schools types (high or low participation in restructuring), with group work and team teaching occurring rarely.

The link between school restructuring efforts and classroom behaviors in this highly restructured district had not occurred, and evidence from other studies indicates that this is not an isolated phenomenon. Another example comes from a study (Meza and Teddlie, 1998; Teddlie and Meza, 1998) of two supposedly restructured schools with very different classroom teaching indicators (one highly effective, one highly ineffective). The restructuring approach that these schools had both followed was one of the well known "special strategies" (Stringfield, Millsap, and Herman, 1997), which had a well articulated, systematic framework for improvement

The fact that two schools engaged in a similar restructuring effort differed on the quality of classroom instruction provides more evidence that participating in a restructuring process does not always impact the instructional core (Elmore, 1995; Fullan, 1993 and Levin, 1996). This result indicates that the direct assessment of classroom teaching quality should occur early in the school improvement process. This study also indicates that the Principal is essential in any improvement effort (Christiansen, 1996 ; Crone & Teddlie, 1995 and Teddlie & Stringfield 1993), since it was mainly differences in the two Principals' behaviors that led to the large differences in teachers' classroom behaviors.

The failure to find evidence of improved teaching in some restructured schools stands in contrast to research that has linked effective teaching with effective schooling. While the teacher effectiveness and school effectiveness literatures evolved separately, several studies have fruitfully merged the methods from these two areas over the past decade (Teddlie, 1994). Researchers conducting sophisticated school effectiveness research (e.g., Brookover, et al, 1979; Mortimore, et al, 1988; Rutter, et al, 1979; Stringfield, Teddlie and Suarez, 1985) began exploring classroom processes during the 1970's and 1980's, due to dissatisfaction with the explanatory power of extant economic and sociological models. These researchers used informal observations and survey proxies for teacher effectiveness variables, and they were able to explore aspects of the schooling process that had not been previously examined in school effectiveness research.

Starting in the mid-1980's, researchers working within the school effectiveness research paradigm began explicitly including classroom observations (and consequently teacher

effectiveness variables) in their research (e.g., Creemers, et al. 1996; Crone and Teddlie, 1995; Stringfield and Teddlie, 1991; Stringfield, Teddlie, and Suarez, 1985; Teddlie, Kirby, and Stringfield, 1989; Teddlie and Stringfield, 1993; Virgilio, Teddlie, and Oescher, 1991). For example, Teddlie, Stringfield and their colleagues used the Stallings' Observation System (SOS) and an instrument composed of variables gleaned from Rosenshine's (1983, 1986) reviews of teacher effectiveness research in their school effectiveness research.

These studies of teacher effectiveness variables within the context of school effectiveness research revealed *consistent mean and standard deviation differences in classroom teaching between schools classified as effective or ineffective*. For example, results from Teddlie, Kirby, and Stringfield (1989) indicated that teachers in effective schools were more successful in keeping students on task, spent more time presenting new material, provided more independent practice, demonstrated higher expectations for students, provided more positive reinforcement, and so forth, than did their peers in matched ineffective schools.

In addition to these mean differences in teaching behaviors between effective/ineffective schools, interesting differences in patterns of variation were also found. For instance, the standard deviations reported for teaching behavior *were smaller* in more effective as opposed to less effective schools. This result indicates that there are processes ongoing at more effective schools (e.g., informed selection of new teachers, effective socialization processes) that result in more homogeneous behavior among teachers in which the "trailing edge" of teaching is somehow eliminated.

This reduced variance in teacher behavior associated with school effectiveness status is a dramatic illustration of the interaction between school and classroom variables. Some process, either selection or socialization or both, must be operating at the school level to result in the classroom level differences.

Therefore, SEAP employs information from both the school and the class levels in its assessment and improvement processes, because current research in school effectiveness and improvement indicate that it is necessary to do so in order to engender true change.

Commonalities Among Leadership and Professional development Recommendations for the 12 Cohort One Schools

Tables 1 and 2 present a content analysis of the frequency of SEAP-II recommendations for school improvement across Cohort One schools (Heroman, Pol, and Franklin, 1998). Table 1 presents the recommendations related to leadership, while Table 2 presents the frequencies related to professional development. It is interesting that there were so many similarities in SEAP-II recommendations across the 12 Cohort One schools, since they represented a cross-section of schools in Louisiana in terms of both demographics and effectiveness.

The three most frequent leadership recommendations involved:

(1) scheduling/planning/protecting academic time,

(2) school and classroom discipline policy, and

(3) classroom observations/feedback.

The three most frequent professional development recommendations involved:

(1) instructional methods,

(2) individual needs/special needs students, and

(3) classroom management.

The remainder of this section involves a discussion of specific recommendations for each of these six leadership and professional development recommendations. These recommendations were excerpted from two of the twelve Cohort One schools (Schools A-3 and B-1). These excerpts are included in this paper to give the reader a better understanding of the nature of the SEAP-II recommendations. The recommendations are located in Table 3.

Schools A-3 and B-1 were somewhat different from one another:

(1) School A-3 was a middle school in South Louisiana, which had a high percentage of low-SES students and which scored low on standardized tests. The school was in transition during the time of the SEAP-II visit: the Principal during SY 1996-97 was replaced in SY 1997-98, due to poor performance. The assessment team was aware of this as they wrote their report. They noted in the Recommendations section that: "The presence of a new Principal in SY 1997-98 will make this an important year for initiating change. The new Principal should use the school improvement team in these efforts."

Table 1
Frequency of SEAP-II Recommendations Across Cohort One Schools: The Leadership Dimension

Leadership Category	Number of Times Noted for Cohort One Schools
Scheduling/Planning/Protecting Academic Time	7
School and Classroom Discipline Policy	7
Classroom Observations/Feedback	4
School Improvement Team	2
Improve Communication/Collaboration	2
Class Size	2
New Principal	1
Reward Pupil Success	1
Homework Plan	1
Special Education	1
Student Involvement	1
Total Recommendations Associated with Leadership	29

Table 2
Frequency of SEAP-II Recommendations Across Cohort One Schools: The Professional Development Dimension

Professional Development Category	Number of Times Noted for Cohort One Schools
Instructional Methods	7
Individual Needs/Special Needs Students	7
Classroom Management	4
Structure Opportunities/Staff Development Coordination	4
Higher Order Thinking Skills	2
Technology, Discipline, and Data Analysis	2
Learning Styles	1
Teachers on Self-Esteem	1
Cooperative Teaching	1
Total Recommendations Associated with Professional Development	29

(2) School B-2 was an elementary school in North Louisiana, which served predominantly middle-class students and which scored above average on standardized tests. The assessment team noted in the Recommendations section that "Although the instructional staff at School B-1 has created and provides a generally positive learning environment, there is room for some improvement."

The example of Leadership Dimension 1, Scheduling/Planning/Protecting Instructional Time, came from School A-3: The administrators and faculty should place a high priority on conserving instructional time. (See Table 3 for more details.)

The example of Leadership Dimension 2, School and Classroom Discipline Policy, also came from School A-3: The school's discipline policies and regulations should be relevant and applied consistently. (See Table 3 for more details.)

The example of Leadership Dimension 3, Classroom Observations/Feedback, came from School B-1: The Principal/instructional leader should increase classroom visitations and corresponding teacher evaluations. (See Table 3 for more details.)

The example of Professional Development Dimension 1, Instructional Methods also came from School B-1: Faculty should be encouraged to use new curricula and instructional techniques. In conjunction, the variety of instruction should be increased to accommodate different learning styles among pupils. (See Table 3 for more details.)

The example of Professional Development Dimension 2, Individual Needs/Special Needs Students, came from School A-3: Instructional delivery should be diversified to accommodate the individual needs of all learners. (See Table 3 for more details.)

The example of Professional Development Dimension 3, Classroom Management, came from School A-3: Teachers should be encouraged to collaborate in their classroom management, instructional planning and delivery. (See Table 3 for more details.)

Table 3
Excerpts from SEAP-II School Improvement Recommendations, Cohort One Schools A-3 and B-1

Example of Leadership Dimension 1 - Scheduling/Planning/Protecting Instructional Time - School A-3

The administrators and faculty should place a high priority on conserving instructional time. Teachers cannot teach and pupils cannot concentrate when instructional time is abbreviated or segmented by interruptions. The school improvement team should take a look at the school schedule in order to identify and recover lost time. Special consideration could be given to:

(a) *restricting use of the public address system to schoolwide announcements* (as opposed to announcements aimed at specific individuals, but broadcast schoolwide), and limiting its use to one (or at most two) *brief* broadcasts each day;

(b) *reducing time lost during transitions to and from lunch*; and

(c) *providing inservice training for teachers on classroom management*, focusing on helping teachers improve transitions within instruction and make better use of instructional time.

Example of Leadership Dimension 2 - School and Classroom Discipline Policy - School A-3

The school's discipline policies and regulations should be relevant and applied consistently. There is a general sentiment among pupils and teachers that too much attention is paid to policing minor infractions, while more serious offenses carry inadequate penalties. This latter criticism particularly relates to misbehavior that is potentially embarrassing to the school and would result in more serious penalties for the pupil if reported to district staff. There is a general perception among pupils that some staff show partiality when enforcing school rules: for some pupils consequences are minimal for misbehavior that would carry serious penalties for others.

As a first step in improving the disciplinary climate, the Principal and staff should consider (a) creating a committee to review and revise the school code of pupil conduct, and (b) make professional development for rule enforcement. The committee should include representatives from the school administration, faculty, parents, and pupils—each elected by peers. An external professional (e.g., a child welfare and attendance officer from the central office or local juvenile justice professional) could prove a valuable resource to the committee and clarify the school's legal responsibilities relative to pupil discipline. Through deliberation, the committee could identify constructive ways to reduce misbehavior while encouraging pupil self-discipline. Discussions may also facilitate "buy-in" from those groups whose support is critical to the long-term enforcement of rules.

Example of Leadership Dimension 3 - Classroom Observations/Feedback - School B-1

The Principal/instructional leader should increase classroom visitations and corresponding teacher evaluations. The strong sense of collaboration between Principal and faculty should be a good foundation for school improvement. Teachers should receive regular feedback regarding their performance in the classroom, especially since there is a natural variance in this performance over time.

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Example of Professional Development Dimension 1 - Instructional Methods - School B-1

Faculty should be encouraged to use new curricula and instructional techniques. In conjunction, the variety of instruction should be increased to accommodate different learning styles among pupils. The use of new technology in the classroom was limited and should be increased. Teachers should also receive training that will enable them to incorporate technological aids in their instruction. The training should go beyond the basic instruction for usage and should include techniques for incorporating technology efficiently and effectively in the classroom. An expanded emphasis on technology also will help teachers to increase the variety of materials used, thereby better addressing the needs of children who are auditory learners, visual learners, kinesthetic learners, etc. Teachers also would benefit from inservices aimed at improving their classroom management skills, especially with regard to maximizing the amount of time available for instruction.

Example of Professional Development Dimension 2 - Individual Needs/Special Needs Students - School A-3

Instructional delivery should be diversified to accommodate the individual needs of all learners. It appears that most of the instruction at School A-3 is whole-group instruction, and that teacher-directed discussion aimed at the average pupil is the primary method of instruction. In too many classes, brighter pupils appeared bored, waiting for their classmates to complete an assignment. Similarly, some pupils may fall behind or become disruptive, attempting to follow a lesson that is too fast-paced. Inservices on various aspects identifying and accommodating individual differences among students should be part of the staff development activities at the school.

Example of Professional Development Dimension 3 - Classroom Management - School A-3

Teachers should be encouraged to collaborate in their classroom management, instructional planning and delivery. The site team found little evidence that teachers regularly meet to coordinate management techniques across classrooms or to coordinate their instruction from one discipline to the next or one grade to the next (e.g., planning lessons so that concepts learned in science reenforce concepts learned in math, or that content taught in fifth grade English is reinforced in sixth grade English).

The teachers should solicit inservice training from the administration on classroom management, focusing on helping teachers improve transitions within instruction and make better use of instructional time. A coordinated behavioral management program across grade should be adopted or developed.

Classes are scheduled in a manner that prohibits joint planning times. Therefore, rearrangement of the school schedule may be necessary to find time for collaborative planning. For instance, the staff might consider a team-teaching approach to scheduling. That is, pupils could be divided into groups, with each group receiving all their instruction from a cross-disciplinary team of four to five teachers. The team could be assigned a common time to plan or discuss the needs of specific pupils (perhaps while the pupils are at physical education or lunch). Several middle schools in Louisiana are using the team-teaching approach with notable success.

III. A Review of the Feedback Sessions Held in Cohort One Schools, October, 1997

The information contained in Sections III and IV comes from evaluations conducted at the School Improvement Conference for Cohort One Schools, November, 1997 (Teddlie, 1997). At that conference, Cohort One Principals and teachers were asked to complete evaluation forms concerning both the feedback sessions that had been held in their schools in October, 1997 and the School Improvement Conference they had just attended.

The following section summarizes the participants' responses to a survey assessing their reactions to the feedback that they had received in October regarding their school site visits from the Spring 1997. This survey was completed by 49 teachers and Principals at the end of the first day of the School Improvement Conference. Altogether the survey contained three closed-ended items and two open-ended items.

Responses to the Closed-Ended Items Regarding the October Feedback

The teachers, Principals, and central office personnel responded to the following closed-ended items:

(1) Was the feedback regarding your school informative?

(2) Was the feedback regarding your school accurate?

(3) Was the feedback regarding your school useful for improvement at your school?

All these closed-ended items had five point response categories ranging from the most negative response (1) to the most positive response (5). For example, the response categories for the first item ranged from (1) not informative to (5) informative. Table 4 contains the means and standard deviations for the participants' responses to the three closed-ended items. Altogether 49 participants completed the evaluation forms.

The average scores for all three closed-ended items was between 4 and 5 on the five point scale, indicating that the participants were generally pleased with the feedback. The highest average score was for the item concerning how informative the feedback was (4.449), while the lowest average score was for the item concerning how accurate the feedback was (4.102).

Table 4

Participants' Responses to the Closed-Ended Items Assessing their Reactions to the October Feedback

Item	Number of Respondents	Average Score of Respondents	Standard Deviation of Responses
1. Was the feedback regarding your school informative?	49	4.449	0.937
2. Was the feedback regarding your school accurate?	49	4.102	1.085
3. Was the feedback regarding your school useful for improvement at your school?	49	4.429	0.979

Note. All these closed-ended items had five point response categories ranging from the most negative response (1) to the most positive response (5). For example, the response categories for the first item ranged from (1) not informative to (5) informative.

The standard deviations were moderate sized (around 1.00), indicating that there was some variance among the responses. The distribution of responses indicated that the majority of respondents (44) rated the items mainly 5s, with some 3s and 4s. A minority of respondents (5) rated the items 1, 2, or 3. More information on these negative responses will be included later in this section.

Responses to the Open-Ended Items Regarding the October Feedback

In addition to answering these closed-ended questions, the participants responded to the following open-ended items:

(1) What was the most useful aspect of the feedback you received?

(2) How could the feedback process be improved for other schools in the future?

As noted above, altogether 49 participants completed the evaluation forms. Their open-ended responses were analyzed using the constant comparative method described by Lincoln and uba (1985), which involves unitizing and categorizing the responses. This constant comparative method was used to analyze open-ended data that will be described throughout this report, including the evaluations of the October feedback, the School Improvement Conference, and the experiences of the school assistance teams in the 12 Cohort One schools in SY 1997-98.

The unitizing aspect of the constant comparative method involves breaking down responses into the smallest pieces of distinct information. In this case, unitizing meant taking each person's responses and breaking them down into the different useful aspects of the October feedback. Thus, the responses from some participants yielded multiple units of information (if they listed more than one useful aspect), while the responses from others yielded no units of information (if they did not respond to the question).

Once the responses were unitized, they were then categorized. This involves giving a label or name to each of the distinct open-ended responses. For instance, if the respondent stated "The feedback gave us objective information regarding our school", this response might be coded "Objective feedback".

Altogether, 59 separate units of information emerged from the categorization of the responses to the question regarding most useful aspects of the October feedback. Table 5

contains a summary of the responses to the question regarding the most useful aspects of the October feedback.

The most frequently occurring response (33.9% of the total responses) was that the feedback session provided recommendations for improvement or mentioned specific areas that needed improvement. Typical responses included the following:

"The information regarding the areas that need improvement. Our team now knows where to begin."

"It provided insights on the 'specifics' in our school that needed improvement."

"It gave us direction for our school improvement"

Altogether, 56 separate units of information emerged from the categorization of the responses to the question regarding ways to improve the feedback in the future. Table 6 contains a summary of the responses to the question regarding ways to improve the feedback in the future.

The three most frequently occurring responses were:

(1) provide more specifics in the recommendations (17.9%),

(2) give feedback before the visit, provide quicker feedback (12.5%), and

(3) provide evaluations of individual teachers (10.7%).

Altogether, these three categories accounted for over 40% of the total number of responses. Typical responses from these categories included:

"More feedback on test scores and improving them."

"The recommendations could be more specific. Leave nothing to question or assumption."

"Presentation to the school staff of findings prior to on-site feedback session in order that staff can review and prepare for questioning."

"Provide immediate feedback."

"Be sure to let each teacher know their strengths and weaknesses individually."

"Give individual teachers their evaluation report."

Most of the categories In Table 6 are self-explanatory, but the "inaccurate feedback" category needs some explanation. While only three participants made this response, they represent a minority of school site personnel who were upset at the feedback they had received.

Table 5
Participants' Responses to the Open-Ended Item Assessing their Perceptions of the Most Useful Aspect of the October Feedback

Category	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Recommendations for Improvement, Specific Areas Needing Improvement	20	33.9%
Objective Feedback, Outsider Point of View	8	13.6%
Assessment of School's Strengths	7	11.9%
Assessment of School's Weaknesses	7	11.9%
Helped Us to Evaluate Our School, Initiate Discussions About Improvement	5	8.5%
Pointed Out Differences in Perceptions	4	6.8%
Provided Positive, Courteous Feedback	2	3.3%
Information on How to Write Goals	2	3.3%
Miscellaneous	4	6.8%
Total	59	100.0%

Note. Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Table 6
Participants' Responses to the Open-Ended Item Assessing their Perceptions of Ways to Improve the Feedback Process in the Future

Category	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Provide More Specifics in the Recommendations	10	17.9%
Give Staff Feedback Before the Visit, Provide Quicker Feedback	7	12.5%
Provide Evaluations of Individual Teachers	6	10.7%
Make Site Visits Earlier in the Year, Spend More Time in the Site Visits	5	8.9%
Explain Questionnaires, Surveys	4	7.1%
Inaccurate Feedback	3	5.4%
Provide Recommendations in Areas That the School Can Control	3	5.4%
Site Visitors Should Write Reports, Provide Feedback	3	5.4%
Tone of Feedback Was Too Negative	2	3.6%
Positive Comments	2	3.6%
Miscellaneous	11	19.6%
Total	56	100%

Note. Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Based on conversations at the School Improvement Conference, these individuals came primarily from one school, with one or two persons from a second school. At the preliminary August meetings between LDE personnel, local superintendents, and Principals, the Principal from one of the 12 schools objected to the feedback received as being "inaccurate". A typical response from this school is as follows:

"I felt as other teachers in our faculty that a 'true picture' of our teaching strategies were not totally observed fairly. The visiting team came for a day and observed in our classrooms for 30-45 minutes and may have seen the same teachers."

This feedback is very useful for SEAP personnel in terms of the development of the site visit process. Some tentative points may be made:

(1) The feedback regarding the inaccuracy of the responses was definitely a minority opinion. Only one of the twelve Cohort One schools was unified in this response, with a second having some reservations. The other ten schools were in agreement that the feedback was accurate and useful.

(2) The SEAP-II procedure involves sampling in several areas: the classroom observations, the parents selected to receive the surveys, the students and teachers selected for the focus groups. It is possible that some unintended biases may emerge from these sampling procedures. This is one reason why a draft report was given to the Principals in advance of the feedback visits, so that they could make suggestions for changes in the final report. This is also one reason why the school's faculty was asked to complete needs assessments, so that the report could be written with the input of those who know the school best.

(3) Feedback concerning perceived inaccuracy of SEAP-II school reports will probably become more common as the process is used to examine schools "in crisis". The experiences with Cohort One schools should help LDE personnel in the future in terms of responding to individuals who perceive the SEAP-II reports to have inaccuracies.

Changes to be Incorporated in Feedback Procedure As a Result of the Evaluations

With regard to the feedback provided to the schools, the following actions will be taken, to the degree possible, in the next round of visits:

(1) Conduct the school visits earlier in the year. For the Cohort Two schools in SY 1997-98, these visits are scheduled to occur in January-March. (This in fact has occurred: all SEAP-II site visits in SY 1997-98 were completed before April.)

(2) Get feedback to the Principals and Superintendents more quickly. This feedback should occur more quickly in SY 1997-98 since templates of the reports have been prepared, and site team members will be able to follow a heavily prescribed outline, with much information already completed, as they write the reports.

(3) Cohort Two faculties will be given preliminary feedback before the school visits, so that they can be better prepared to ask questions and respond to the report.

(4) The surveys and questionnaires will be explained in more detail in the feedback to the faculties.

(5) Individuals who conducted the site visits will be more involved in the writing of the reports and in the delivery of the feedback to the Cohort Two schools.

(6) Perceived inaccuracies in the reports will be taken into consideration in the production of the final report and in the generation of the commendations and recommendations.

IV. A Synopsis of the School Improvement Conference for Cohort One Schools, November, 1997

A School Improvement Conference was held for the twelve schools Cohort One schools, selected LDE and RSC employees (including those individuals who were on the school assiatance teams), LSU employees, and other interested parties in Baton Rouge on November 3-4, 1997. This training was intended to prepare the participants to conduct SEAP-III school improvement activities during SY 1997-98.

Altogether 108 individuals attended the workshop, including: 49 Principals and teachers from the 12 Cohort One schools, 11 district central office personnel, 43 members of the LDE staff, and 5 others (from LSU, the state school boards association, representatives of teacher unions, etc.)

The agenda for the School Improvement Conference included:

(1) four team breakout sessions for the school site teams, (2) an overview of the current state accountability initiatives, (3) an overview of the school improvement process, (4) a presentation by Sam Stringfield, from Johns Hopkins University, on special strategies for school improvement, (5) presentations on using achievement data to make decisions and on developing measurable goals, (6) a presentation on examining attitudinal and behavioral data in developing school improvement plans by Charles Teddlie, from Louisiana State University, (7) a presentation on forming school improvement teams, (8) a presentation by Jim Meza, from the University of New Orleans, on school reform in Louisiana 1990-97, (9) presentations on implementing planned change through staff development and content specific school improvement strategies, (10) presentations on finding resources to support school improvement by LDE, SRC, and university staff, and (11) a separate breakout session for the Principals. The Principal session was added due to feedback received at the conference regarding the importance of getting the Principals together for networking purposes.

Numerous training materials were also prepared and distributed at the meeting.

The survey assessing the participants' reactions to the School Improvement Conference was distributed at the end of the second day of the conference. The survey contained three closed-ended items and three open-ended items. This survey was completed by all conference

participants, including school site personnel, central office personnel, and LDE personnel. Altogether 77 participants completed the evaluation forms. The remainder of the participants, primarily LDE employees who attended only one day of the conference, did not complete the evaluation forms.

Responses to the Closed-Ended Items Regarding the School Improvement Conference

The evaluation form contained the following closed-ended items:

(1) Was the School Improvement Conference informative?

(2) Was the School Improvement Conference useful?

(3) Was the School Improvement Conference relevant to improvement at your school?

All these closed-ended items had five point response categories ranging from the most negative response (1) to the most positive response (5). For example, the response categories for the first item ranged from (1) not informative to (5) informative. Tables 6-8 contain the means and standard deviations for the participants' responses to the three closed-ended items, broken down into groups based on where the participant was employed.

The average scores for all three closed-ended items for all groups was between 4 and 5 on the five point scale, indicating that the participants were generally pleased with the School Improvement Conference. The highest average score for the item concerning "how informative" was the conference was given by the central office personnel (4.833), while the lowest average score was given by school site team members (4.256). The overall mean score across all participants was 4.481, with a standard deviation of 0.736. (See Table 7.)

The highest average score for the item concerning "how useful" was the conference was given by the LDE personnel (4.708), while the lowest average score was given by the school site team members (4.230). The overall mean score across all participants was 4.455, with a standard deviation of 0.787. (See Table 8.)

The highest average score for the item concerning "how relevant"was the conference to improvement at your school(s)" was given by central office personnel (4.833), while the lowest average score was given by the school site team members (4.230). The overall mean score across all participants was 4.346, with a standard deviation of 0.883. (See Table 9.)

Table 7. Participants' Responses to the Closed-Ended Item Assessing How Informative the Conference Was

Group	Number of Respondents	Average Score of Respondents	Standard Deviation of Responses
School Site Team	39	4.256	0.818
Central Office	6	4.833	0.408
LDE Personnel	24	4.708	0.550
No Designation	8	4.625	0.744
Total	77	4.481	0.736

Note. The response categories for this item ranged from (1) not informative to (5) informative.

Table 8. Participants' Responses to the Closed-Ended Item Assessing How Useful the Conference Was

Group	Number of Respondents	Average Score of Respondents	Standard Deviation of Responses
School Site Team	39	4.230	0.872
Central Office	6	4.667	0.516
LDE Personnel	24	4.708	0.624
No Designation	8	4.625	0.744
Total	77	4.455	0.787

Note. The response categories for this item ranged from (1) not useful to (5) useful.

Table 9. Participants' Responses to the Closed-Ended Item Assessing How Relevant the Conference Was to Improvement at Their School

Item	Number of Respondents	Average Score of Respondents	Standard Deviation of Responses
School Site Team	39	4.230	0.930
Central Office	6	4.833	0.480
No Designation	7	4.571	0.787
Total	52	4.346	0.883

Note. The response categories for this item ranged from (1) not relevant to (5) relevant.

Responses to the Open-Ended Items Regarding the School Improvement Conference

In addition to answering these closed-ended questions, the participants responded to the following open-ended items regarding the School Improvement Conference:

(1) What was the most useful aspect of the School Improvement Conference?

(2) What actions will you take as a result of this conference?

(3) How could the School Improvement Conference be improved in the future?

Altogether, 116 separate units of information emerged from the categorization of the responses to the question regarding the most useful aspect of the School Improvement Conference. Table 10 contains a summary of the responses to the question regarding the most useful aspects of the School Improvement Conference.

The three most frequently occurring responses to this question were:

(1) small group team meetings (25.9% of the total responses),

(2) speakers (25.0%), and

(3) focus on improvement, goal setting (19.8%).

Thus, 70.7% of the respondents indicated that these three aspects of the conference were the most useful. Typical responses regarding the small group team meetings were as follows:

"Small group sessions that could discuss 'real life' situations"

"Sharing in small groups. At this conference I think our team was clearly able to see in what direction we need to move."

"The small groups where we walked through the processes with lots of information."

The speakers were seen as a strength of the conference, and several of them were mentioned by name. Typical responses regarding the speakers were as follows:

"The information given by the speakers was very useful in developing our plan."

"Having some 'new blood' share ideas with us."

"Speakers were prepared, informative, and entertaining."

The focus on improvement and goal setting was the third most often mentioned "useful aspect" of the conference. Typical responses included the following:

"As a participant with a limited knowledge of school improvement measures, I feel I am leaving with a broader understanding of the concept."

Table 10
Participants' Responses to the Open-Ended Item Assessing their Perceptions of the Most Useful Aspect of the November 3-4 School Improvement Conference

Category	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Small Group Team Meetings	30	25.9%
Speakers	29	25.0%
Focus on Improvement, Goal Setting	23	19.8%
Networking, Bonding	9	7.8%
Facilitators	5	4.3%
Meeting with State, Regional Personnel; Meeting with School Administrators	5	4.3%
Information on Data Analysis Applied to Improvement	4	3.4%
Resources for School Improvement	2	1.7%
Negative Comments	2	1.7%
Miscellaneous	7	6.0%
Total	116	100%

Note. Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

"Helped address strengths and weaknesses as focal points for goals and objectives."

"The most useful aspect of the conference was the information presented in helping with creating goals."

Responses to the open-ended question asking "What actions will you take as a result of this conference?" were broken into two sets of categories: those for the school site personnel (Table 11) and those for the other participants, such as central office staff and LDE employees (Table 12). As indicated in Table 11, 51 separate units of information emerged from the categorization of the responses to this question by the school site personnel.

The three most frequently occurring responses to this question were:

(1) develop improvement plans and goals, revise improvement plans (25.5% of the total responses),

(2) involve other faculty in process, more teamwork, revise improvement committee structure (21.6%), and

(3) implement improvement process (17.6%).

Thus, 65% of the respondents indicated that these were the actions that they would take as a result of attending the School Improvement Conference. All of these responses had to do with directly starting or improving a school improvement plan. Typical responses regarding developing improvement plans and goals or revising improvement plans included the following:

"Meet as a team at the school level to target goals and objectives."

"We will reexamine our school improvement plan so it can conform with ideas presented here."

Typical responses regarding involving other faculty in the process, promoting more teamwork, or revising the improvement committee structure included the following:

"Take back information to fellow faculty members."

"Reorganize school improvement committee structure."

"We hope to create two goals regarding reading. We will do this in a cooperative, small 'team' group setting."

Typical responses regarding implementing the improvement process included the following:

Table 11
School Site Personnel's Responses to the Open-Ended Item Assessing their Perceptions of the Actions That They Will Take as a Result of the November 3-4 School Improvement Conference

Category	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Develop Improvement Plans and Goals, Revise Improvement Plans	13	25.5%
Involve Other Faculty in Process, More Teamwork, Revise Improvement Committee Structure	11	21.6%
Implement Improvement Process	9	17.6%
Develop a More Enthusiastic and Open Approach	5	9.8%
Request and Employ Resources for Improvement	4	7.8%
More Staff Development	3	5.9%
Miscellaneous	6	11.8%
Total	51	100%

"Bring back to school and put into action plans we came up with."

"Put into action our goals."

As indicated in Table 12, 40 separate units of information emerged from the categorization of the responses to the question asking about actions "that they will take" by other personnel (central office personnel, LDE personnel). The four most frequently occurring responses to this question were:

(1) provide technical assistance to districts, schools (37.5% of the total responses),

(2) hold meetings regarding information, disseminate materials (12.5%),

(3) prepare to provide technical assistance (10%), and

(4) provide resources for school improvement (7.5%).

The final open-ended question asked "How could the conference be improved in the future?" As indicated in Table 13, 93 separate units of information emerged from the categorization of the responses to this question by the participants.

The most frequently occurring suggestion for improving the School Improvement Conference was to have "more small groups interaction, more discussion" (23.7%). Typical responses regarding this suggestion included the following:

"Additional time in small group meeting. Team likes to share and problem solve."

"Not enough time for individual team meetings."

"Longer group time to implement improvements."

"Spend more time discussing problem analysis and problem definition before the groups work on goal setting."

No other suggestion for improvement was made by more than 10% of the participants. The next five most frequently made suggestions were:

(2) better facilities (9.7%),

(3) revise schedule (7.5%),

(4) need a follow up workshop, need meetings at school (7.5%),

(5) provide further opportunities for networking (6.5%), and

(6) too much time in presentations (6.5%).

Table 12
Other Participants' Responses to the Open-Ended Item Assessing their Perceptions of the Actions That They Will Take as a Result of the November 3-4 School Improvement Conference

Category	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Provide Technical Assistance to Districts, Schools	15	37.5%
Hold Meetings Regarding Information, Disseminate Materials	5	12.5%
Prepare to Provide Assistance	4	10.0%
Provide Resources for School Improvement	3	7.5%
Adopt a School	1	2.5%
Miscellaneous	8	20.0%
Positive Comments	4	10.0%
Total	40	100%

Table 13
Participants' Responses to the Open-Ended Item Assessing their Perceptions of Ways to Improve the November 3-4 School Improvement Conference

Category	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
More Small Groups Interaction, More Discussion	23	24.7%
Better Facilities	9	9.7%
Revise Schedule	7	7.5%
Need a Followup Workshop, Need Meetings at School	7	7.5%
Provide Further Opportunities for Networking	6	6.5%
Too Much Time in Presentations	6	6.5%
Include Other Personnel	4	4.3%
More Time with Facilitators	4	4.3%
Prepare Participants for Conference	1	1.1%
Positive Comments	11	11.8%
Miscellaneous	15	16.1%
Total	93	100%

Changes to be Incorporated into the Conference as a Result of the Evaluation

It is unclear what type of School Improvement Conference will be held for Cohort Two schools in the Fall 1998, since there will be a much larger number of them (45). However, if such a conference(s) is held for Cohort Two schools, the following changes may be made:

(1) Schedule more small group sessions, since the Cohort One site team members found them so beneficial.

(2) Schedule a breakout session for the Principals, since the addition of this to the Cohort One conference was so successful.

(3) Provide more formal mechanisms for the schools to network after the improvement conference.

(4) Send the participants more information about the conference in advance of the meeting, so they can better prepare for it.

(5) Hold the meeting in a larger facility.

IV. A Description of the Experiences of the School Assistance Teams in the 12 Cohort One Schools in SY 1997-98

The following section summarizes the responses of 17 individuals (10 LDE employees, seven RSC employees) to a questionnaire concerning their contacts with schools during the school improvement phase of the SY 1997-98 SEAP program. These participants had been assigned, as members of an assistance team, to 12 schools that had been intensively assessed the previous year (SY 1996-97) using SEAP-II procedures. Information in this section has been taken from an evaluation report based on responses to the questionnaire (Teddlie, 1998).

Two state employees (one from the LDE and one from the RSC in the region in which the school was located) were scheduled to visit each of the schools during the early part of 1998. They were to assist the schools in any way possible with the SEAP recommendations and with their School Improvement Plan (SIP). The nature of the assistance was to be determined by the school, not by the LDE and SRC employees, who were to make themselves available to the school personnel for whatever assistance they (the school personnel) deemed appropriate.

A meeting was held on February 26, 1998 at the LDE to solicit feedback from the school assistance teams regarding their activities with the 12 Cohort One School Improvement Teams. This meeting involved each team verbally summarizing its visits to the Cohort One schools and completing a questionnaire concerning those visits.

Methodology

The questionnaire that each assistance team completed included three closed-ended items:

(1) Is there an active school improvement process ongoing at the school you visited?

(2) What kind of impact did the SEAP process (the intensive school assessment, the fall school improvement conference, your visits) have on the improvement efforts at the school you visited?

(3) Did the school representatives that you met on your visit actively solicit further assistance from you in their ongoing school improvement process?

There were also four open-ended items:

(1) Who met with you during your visit to the Cohort One school in January or February

1998? When did the meeting occur?

(2) Describe the meeting that you had with the representatives at your school.

(3) Describe the school improvement activities that you have undertaken (or will undertake) at your school this year (SY 1997-98).

(4) What should the Department of Education and the Regional Service Centers do to assist Cohort One and Cohort Two schools in their improvement activities for SY 1998-99?

The three open-ended items were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and ranges of scores for each of the items. The four open-ended items were analyzed using the constant comparative method described in an earlier section of this report.

There were 17 members of the 12 Cohort One school assistance teams: 10 LDE employees and 7 SRC employees. Several of the team members, especially the SRC employees, were assigned to two or more schools. At the time of the February 26, 1998 meeting, reports were completed on only nine of the 12 schools. The other three schools had not been visited due to scheduling conflicts. Team members completed one questionnaire together for each school.

Results from the Closed-Ended Items

The mean response to the item concerning whether there was an active school improvement process at the school they visited was 3.89 on a five point scale, on which a response of "5" indicated a "very active process" and "3" indicated a "somewhat active process". The responses to this item included: two "5's", four "4's", and three "3's". (See Table 14.)

The mean response to the item concerning the impact the SEAP process was having on the improvement efforts at the school they visited was 3.22 on a five point scale, on which a response of "5" indicated a "large impact" and "3" indicated a "medium impact". The responses to this item included: two "5's", two "4's", two "3's", two "2's", and one "1". This wide range of responses indicates the importance of the individual differences among the schools in the study.

The mean response to the item concerning whether school representatives actively solicited further assistance from the team members was 3.11 on a five point scale, on which a response of "5" indicated "a lot of assistance" and "3" indicated "some assistance". The responses to this item included: two "5's", four "3's", and three "2's".

Table 14
Responses of the School Improvement Teams to the Closed-Ended Items

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range of Responses
(1) Is there an active school improvement process ongoing at the school you visited?	3.89	0.78	3-5
(2) What kind of impact did the SEAP process have on the improvement efforts at the school you visited?	3.22	1.39	1-5
(3) Did the school representatives that you met on your visit actively solicit further assistance from you in their ongoing school improvement process?	3.11	1.16	2-5

Note. Responses to item (1) ranged from 1 (not at all active) to 5 (very active). Responses to item (2) ranged from 1 (not impact at all) to 5 (large impact). Responses to item (3) ranged from 1 (they want no assistance) to 5 (they want a lot of assistance).

Results from the Open-Ended Items

Table 15-18 contain a summaries of the information from the four open-ended items after the responses had been analyzed using the constant comparative method described above.

As indicated in Table 15, the LDE/SRC School Assistance Team met with the Principal on eight of the nine scheduled visits. The only time the Principal did not meet with the school assistance team was due to a "major mix up on the part of the Principal", in which the Principal had mistakenly attended another meeting and had not informed his staff. The Assistant Principal met with the school assistance team instead, and another site visit was scheduled.

Teachers were involved in six of the nine meetings; there were as many as six teachers in two meeting and as few as one in two other meetings. The Assistant Principal attended three of the meetings, while the entire School Improvement Team (or planning committee) attended three meetings. Some parents attended one of the meeting, while a district central office supervisor attended another.

From the composition of the school representatives attending the school assistance meeting, it could be concluded that a good faith effort was being put forward in at least five of the nine schools. These schools had the following persons attending the meeting: (1) Principal, teacher, central office supervisor, randomly selected teachers (met informally after the scheduled meeting); (2) Principal, Assistant Principal, and six teachers; (3) Principal and planning committee; (4) Principal, Assistant Principal, and four members of the School Improvement Team; and (5) Principal, planning committee members, and parents.

Only the Principal attended two of the school meetings, and only the Assistant Principal (in the place of the Principal) attended at a third school. Furthermore, the six faculty members who attended at another school were "picked by the Principal" and seemed "happy with the status quo" according to the school assistance team.

The LDE/SRC assistance team provided more information regarding the SEAP school improvement recommendations at all nine schools, as indicated in Table 16. Details about what the school was doing with regard to their school improvement plans was forthcoming at seven of

Table 15
Summary of Responses to the Item Concerning
Who the LDE/SRC School Assistance Team Met with During
Their Visits to the Cohort One Schools

School Representatives	Number of Times the School Representatives Met with the LDE/SRC Representatives
Principal	8
Teachers	6
Assistant Principal	3
School Improvement Team, Planning Committee	3
Parents of Students	1
Central Office Representative	1

Table 16
Topics Discussed During
Visits to the Cohort One Schools

Topic Discussed	Number of Times this Topic Was Discussed
LDE/SRC Representatives Provided More Specifics Regarding the SEAP School Improvement Recommendations	9
School Representatives Described their Activities Related to their School Improvement Plan or Title I Schoolwide Program	7
Participants Discussed Loss of Teaching Time, Off Task Behavior, Etc.	3
Participants Discussed Follow-up to Prescribed Staff Development Activities	2
Participants Discussed Other Specific Aspects of School Improvement	5

the nine schools. Thus, these scheduled school site visits could be characterized, in general, as two-way communication opportunities for both the school assistance team and the local school improvement representatives to exchange information regarding recommendations for school change and what had been ongoing thus far in terms of that change. Specific problems with teacher performance in the classroom and staff development activities were topics that emerged in several of the schools.

Responses by the LDE/RSC school assistance teams indicated that they had already initiated some type of school assistance in six of the nine schools before the scheduled site visit, as indicated in Table 17. The types of assistance included: giving demonstration lessons, providing resources, conducting workshops on school improvement plans, and providing assistance on new state testing plan. The list of resources provided was lengthy, including: research based practices, videos, standards based lesson plans, resource lists, and statewide school improvement plan formats. Of the three schools that had not been directly contacted before the site visit, two requested information of some sort that the school assistance team was to provide them in the future. The remaining school was the one in which the Principal had forgotten the meeting. Assistance to this school was "on hold" until a formal meeting occurred.

The final open-ended question asked the school assistance teams to suggest what the LDE and the RSCs could do to assist Cohort One and Cohort Two schools in their improvement activities for School Year 1998-99. (Cohort Two schools are being intensively assessed during the School Year 1997-98.) The responses to this question are summarized in Table 18. The four most frequent responses to this item were:

(1) Increase contact with schools by calling and conducting monthly meetings to discuss school improvement efforts. Use a structured protocol in these meetings. (Suggested by four school assistance teams.)

(2) Provide ongoing technical assistance (including staff development) and provide resources for continuous improvement as requested by the school site improvement team. (Suggested by four school assistance teams.)

(3) Provide more demonstrations of "hands on" solutions to teaching deficiencies. (Suggested by two school assistance teams.)

Table 17
Descriptions of School Improvement Activities Undertaken by LDE/SRC School Improvement Teams at Cohort One Schools, SY 1997-98

School Improvement Activity	Number of Times this Specific School Improvement Activity was Described
Visited Schools for Specific School Improvement Activity	6
Sent School Improvement Materials (e.g., research based practices, videos, standards based lesson plans, resource lists, statewide school improvement plan formats)	4
Gave Demonstration Lessons	2
Conducted Workshop on Writing School Improvement Plans	1
Provided Assistance on Increasing Parent and Community Interactions with the School	1
Provided Assistance on New Statewide Testing Program	1

Table 18
Suggestions for What the LDE and SRCs Can Do to Assist SEAP Cohorts One and Two in their School Improvement Activities During SY 1998-99

Suggestion	Number of Times the Suggestion Was Made
Call and Conduct Monthly Meetings to Discuss School Improvement Efforts. Use Structured Protocol. Increase Contact with Schools.	4
Provide Ongoing Technical Assistance (including Staff Development) and Provide Resources for Continuous Improvement as Requested by the School Site Improvement Team.	4
Provide More Demonstrations of "Hands On" Solutions to Teaching Deficiencies	2
Have LDE/SRC Assist in Writing/Revising School Improvement Plans. Include SEAP Recommendations in SIPs.	2
Provide Information on Funding Sources for School Improvement Efforts.	1
Document the Process of LDE/SRC Assistance in a Standardized Manner.	1
Develop Method for Informing the District Superintendent of the Results of the Improvement Efforts.	1

(4) Have the LDE and SRCs assist in the writing and revising of School Improvement Plans. Include SEAP recommendations in the revised SIPs. (Suggested by two school assistance teams.)

Conclusions

The verbal reports and written responses to the questionnaires indicated that:

(1) There was a sizeable impact of SEAP-II assessments on three of the schools, who were looking for considerable assistance from the LDE/SRC assistance teams.

(2) The SEAP-II assessment had some impact in four other schools, who were also looking for some assistance from the LDE/SRC assistance teams.

(3) The SEAP-II assessment had little impact in two schools, who were also not really interested in assistance from the LDE/SRC assistance teams.

There was a great deal of variance among the schools, and within the districts, in their responses to SEAP. The questionnaire responses indicated that the SEAP-II intensive assessment process had at least a medium impact on the school improvement processes at six of the nine schools. The three schools where this did not occur may be characterized as follows:

(1) One school had a Principal who was about to retire and who did not want any meaningful change to occur at his school. He had "handpicked" teachers for the scheduled meeting with the school assistance team who were satisfied with the status quo. This happened in a district with a superintendent who was willing to make changes and illustrates the power of a Principal to effectively, and unilaterally, block school reform.

(2) One school had a first year Principal, Assistant Principal, and secretary. The Principal indicated that he had been trying to straighten out procedural matters up until the time of the school assistance team's visit and was ready to begin "work on the instructional aspect" of the school. This school had just begun writing its school improvement plan. The school assistance team believed that the Principal would eventually seek out help from the LDE/SRC team.

(3) The third school was the one where the Principal had forgotten the meeting. This was also a first year Principal in a district where the Superintendent placed a lot of emphasis on continuous school improvement. The school assistance team indicated that the school

administration wanted a lot of assistance; they just hadn't got organized enough to request it.

There was also a great deal of variance among the schools with regard to their response to SEAP-III, the school assistance part of the program, which was just being piloted in SY 1997-98. The questionnaire responses indicated that six of the schools were asking for at least some assistance from the LDE/RSC school assistance teams in their ongoing school improvement processes. The three remaining schools, where this was rated a "2", may be characterized as follows:

(1) The first school was the same one characterized above as having a Principal who was about to retire and who did not want any meaningful change to occur at his school.

(2) The second school was the same one characterized above as having a first year Principal and staff that were just beginning to write its school improvement plan.

(3) The third school also had a first year Principal, but she had very definite ideas about the direction in which she wanted to take her school. The school assistance members wrote that "We left with an understanding that they will call when they need assistance." It is interesting to note that a change in leadership was one of the recommendations that was made in the SEAP-II report for the school in the previous year. For this action, at least, the SEAP-II recommendations had been followed.

While there were some negative responses to the SEAP-II recommendations and SEAP-III school assistance teams in SY 1997-98, the majority of the school responses were positive. (Generally speaking, seven of the nine schools that were visited responded positively.) There were, in fact, some surprises in terms of the positivity of the response. The best example of this was a school which had responded very negatively to the SEAP-II feedback in the Spring 1997. This negativity had carried over into the November, 1997 school improvement meeting. Past that point, changes began to occur as the RSC school assistance member began to interact with the Principal and staff. The school's personnel decided that while the SEAP-II report was still "flawed", there was some merit to it and began to work on certain aspects of suggested school change. The LDE/RSC assistance team gave a response of "5" to the closed-ended "impact" item on the questionnaire, indicating that the SEAP process had a large impact on the improvement efforts at the school.

The variance across the schools' responses to the SEAP-III improvement process in SY 1997-98 indicates the need for more consistency in the following years. To a certain degree, this was to be expected, since the SEAP-III activities for SY 1997-98 were limited due to the emphasis on refining the SEAP-II process. One positive note regarding the SEAP-III process for SY 1997-98 concerns the interaction between the school assistance team members. At the February 26 meeting of the LDE and SRC team members, several spoke of the positive interactions that had occurred between them and also noted that they had learned from one another. The LDE personnel were particularly vocal about learning a lot about school improvement from the RSC personnel.

A number of suggestions for improving the process emerged from this evaluation:

(1) Name the LDE/RSC assistance team as soon as possible.

(2) Have the RSC person involved in the final stages of the writing of the SEAP-II report, so that they can be more familiar with the findings and have an influence especially on the writing of the recommendations.

(3) Start the school assistance process sooner, probably right after the faculty meeting in which the commendations and recommendations are presented (in September or October 1998).

(4) The school LDE/RSC assistance team should ask the Principal and School Improvement Team to bring their plans for addressing (or reasons for not addressing) the SEAP-II recommendations to the first scheduled meeting of the two groups.

(5) The SEAP-II recommendations should be seen as an enhancement to the School Improvement Plan that already exists at the school.

(6) The LDE/RSC assistance team should come to the first meeting with the School Improvement Team with a list of all available resources and services relevant to the SEAP-II recommendations.

(7) There should be regional school improvement conferences in the early Fall 1998 catering to the schools in the RSC regions who have gone through the SEAP-II process in the Spring semester 1998.

IV. Plans for School Improvement in SY 1998-99 and Future Years

The overall plan for whole school improvement for the SEAP schools is designed with a twofold purpose. The first objective of this school redesign model targets improvement in classroom teaching behavior. This approach is founded on the assumption that the main purpose of restructuring schools is to transform teaching and learning. Improving schools can be thought as bringing the structure of the classroom in conformity with best available knowledge about teaching and learning. Transforming teaching practice in turn will lead to improvement in student learning (Elmore, 1995). The second purpose of the SEAP plan develops capacity at the school site to support these effective teaching practices through the implementation of comprehensive school reform. Comprehensive school reform is a dramatically different approach to school reform that focuses on reorganizing and revitalizing the entire school, rather than on isolated piecemeal reforms. This improvement strategy uses well-researched and well documented models of school-wide change supported by external technical assistance. Schools engaged in comprehensive school reform have challenging academic standards, engaged teachers, and strong parental and community support (United States Department of Education, 1998).

"Front Loading" Improvement in Classroom Teaching Behavior

Most researchers agree that it takes approximately five years to restructure a school (Levin, 1992). Meza & Teddlie (1998) report that deep changes in teaching practice are rare events and that instructional practice is the most difficult to change. The researchers further report that schools participating in a similar restructuring effort differed in teacher effectiveness. Evaluation reports of a Louisiana statewide restructuring effort indicate high levels of improvement in school contextual variables and process outcomes, such as, student attendance, school discipline, parental involvement and overall school climate. These outcomes occur frequently, and in some cases, during the first year of the change process. The studies also indicate improvement in academic achievement for the restructuring schools, however, there is very limited evidence of improved student achievement during the early years of the restructuring effort (Meza, Kennedy & Teddlie, 1997; Oescher, Brooks, & Meza, 1996).

The SEAP school improvement plan is an attempt to change this pattern of delayed and inconsistent outcomes in academic achievement for restructuring schools. The SEAP school improvement plan is designed to "front load" changes in teaching and learning through intensive professional development. Emphasis will be placed on developing special strategies for teaching disadvantaged children. Guided by the findings of the SEAP assessments, the SEAP schools, with assistance from the district and state, will develop professional development plans for the teachers and Principals. This approach to school improvement uses the teacher as the change agent. These teachers become the catalyst and energy behind transforming teaching practice in the school.

Building Capacity for Comprehensive School Reform

The second part of the SEAP school improvement plan consists of building capacity to improve the readiness level of the school for implementation of comprehensive school reform. Capacity building for the SEAP schools centers on three themes, 1) exploration and buy-in, 2) alignment, and 3) professional support systems.

Exploration and Buy-In

To assure SEAP schools are better prepared to implement a comprehensive change process, exploration and buy-in by the school communities is the first step in building capacity. Horsley & Kaser (1998) suggest that school change participants examine the values inherent in the proposed changes and specify ways that the change represents a good fit between the school or school district's values. The SEAP schools' full staff (administrators, teachers, para-professionals, and parent representatives) will carefully explore research based and effective comprehensive school designs. The schools, with assistance from the Louisiana State Department of Education and the school district, will consider a full range of comprehensive school reform models and determine which model is the best "fit" for their school. Agreement by 80% of the school community is needed before a model is selected. This high acceptance rate ensures that the school community is committed to implementing the design successfully. A written statement by the school district superintendent, supporting the decision of the SEAP school community, is an essential step in the early stages of building capacity for school wide change and establishing a

collaborative relationship between the school and the district's central office.

Alignment

The state and district expectations and administrative procedures governing SEAP schools need to be aligned to support the school's priorities in the restructuring process. Areas of alignment include, policies and reporting procedures, funding, and professional development.

The Louisiana State Department of Education, local school districts, and SEAP schools will work collaboratively to align state and district policy and amend administrative regulations to support the SEAP school improvement processes. One example of this collaborative effort is for the district and state to accept the SEAP school improvement plan as the Title I school improvement plan annually request by the district and state. A second example of regulatory alignment is for the district to use teacher and Principal evaluation instruments that are inclusive of teacher and Principal's strength and weaknesses which are reported in the SEAP assessment findings.

Odden (1995) indicates that teaching all students to high standards is a goal that may not be achievable with the way schools are fiscally managed today. In the SEAP plan, funding at the state and district level will be aligned and allocated to support the priorities established by the SEAP school improvement plans. One strategy is the state and district can use to support SEAP schools is to cluster federal, state, and local financial resources. Funding, including , Title I, Goals 2000, technology grant awards, Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program, can be fenced under the umbrella of school improvement and allocate these funds to priorities of the SEAP schools. A second strategy is for the state, local school district, and school site to reallocate existent funding, specifically those monies currently dedicated to non-instructional areas, to professional development and other school improvement priorities. Reallocation of funding is a strategy that may be particulary effective for many schools with high concentrations of students from low-income families (Odden, 1995).

The Louisiana State Department of Education and local school districts of the SEAP schools will align professional development for Principals and teachers consistent and focused on the priorities established by the SEAP schools and the findings of the SEAP external assistance

school visits. This professional alignment includes state level training, such as, the Principal leadership training and workshops offered by the state's regional service centers.

Professional Development Support Systems

Haslam (1995) indicates that professional development is the cornerstone of school transformation. Professional networking builds on the strengths of the diverse experiences of members of the SEAP schools. Interactions with colleagues in other SEAP schools will also provide revitalization to sustain the hard work of school change. District and statewide networking opportunities, such as, grade level meetings, school visits, and periodic Principal meetings, will be offered to the SEAP schools. These professional meetings will provide opportunities for collaborative work, directly tied to improved performance for students, with colleagues in the SEAP network.

Schedule of implementation of SEAP schools' improvement plan:

Summer and Fall, 1998	Principals and Teachers begin intensive professional development on special strategies in teaching disadvantaged children.
Fall, 1998	SEAP schools conducts exploration and buy-in to a comprehensive school reform model.
Spring, 1999	School initiates implementation of comprehensive school reform process.

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